MINUTE

ADOPTED ON THE 18TH MARCH, 1858, BY THE

PUBLISHING COMMITTEE OF THE AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY,

EXPLANATORY OF THEIR POSITION IN RELATION TO THE REPORT AND RESOLUTIONS OF THE COMMITTEE OF FIFTEEN, AS SANCTIONED AT THE ANNIVERSARY OF 1857;

AND THE

ACT OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ADOPTING SUCH MINUTE.

The Publishing Committee of the American Tract Society deem it but just to place, at this time, upon their own records a minute of their action, and of the motives and views inducing such their action, with regard to the resolutions of the Society adopted at its last anniversary. Those resolutions respected the issue of tracts upon the duties growing out of slavery, and upon the evils promoted by it.

The providence of God in removing most unexpectedly from this Committee by death their honored and beloved brother the Rev. John Knox, D. D., their chairman, a man taken from us amid the benedictions and lamentations of our entire community, seemed to bind upon the survivors, as but just to his memory, the duty of presenting those views which he aided the committee in reaching, and of giving to them such form as may abide, should they his fellow-laborers, or any one of them, be soon summoned to follow him. Each revision of the subject, with the aid of the varied and earnest comments proffered from opposite quarters, has served but to root in the minds of the Publishing Committee the more deeply, the conviction that duty to the Society, to the interests involved, to the conflicting parties, and to themselves, all united in shutting up the committee to the course actually adopted, as the only course of action which, at the time and in the premises, was either expedient, equitable, or legitimate; or which was at all to be reconciled with the whole action of the Society in adopting the report of the Committee of Fifteen.

It needs scarcely to be stated that the institution is a national

one, of limited powers, and with certain restrictions as to its province, laws, and aims. Its platform by no means includes all the duties incumbent upon any one of its individual members. Each man in its membership is also a member of other spheres, personal, domestic, national, denominational, and religious. These several fields may touch and overlap at many points, and again at other points widely diverge. Acts of fidelity to a man's personal and relative obligations, required in one walk, may be entirely out of place, and become acts of intrusion and usurpation, if transported by him without the consent of his associates into another where they do not belong. The home, the pulpit, the voting precinct, the state, the nation, the ecclesiastical brotherhood, the wider fellowship of evangelical Protestantism, the platform of philanthropic reform, have all their various and appropriate duties. Offices to which a man may be bound in one of these provinces, if transferred by him as equally binding everywhere, may, thus carried over into other regions of duty, infringe on the rights of others. The duty, dislodged from its fitting place, and badly located in another, of other limits and objects, may be transmuted there into a wrong and a provocation. A man may legitimately, in the ecclesiastical sphere of his conscientious preferences, give full scope to his denominational sympathies, and avow and discharge there the consequent obligations. But transfer him to the jury box or the judge's chair, and if he in this new position make his denominational alliances the law of his verdict or his judgment, it becomes a grievous wrong.

The errors and wrongs of European Christendom have for centuries largely grown out of the blending blindly together the distinct and uncongenial spheres to which the same man belonged, but which he was not therefore warranted to confound and to identify. He belonged as a citizen to the state, and as a Christian to the church. But because the two claimed, both of them, him the one man, and covered also the same territorial limits in the ordinary judgment, it was assumed that the two provinces were coincident. The Pharisee presented the question of tribute to the Roman as a weapon on one of whose prongs he was sure to transfix Christ. If the Saviour recognized the Gentile ruler, then would the caviller have denounced a Messiah who was thus faithless to the old Hebrew theocracy, and who truckled basely to the uncircumcised Pagan. Had our Lord abjured the Roman to placate the Jew, then how soon

could the informer have cited Him before Cæsar as a kindler of sedition. Our Lord quietly replied, in fact, that their sins had brought on them the yoke of the stranger, and themselves had accepted the sceptre and currency of Cæsar. Let Cæsar have his own. As to God, let them give him the religious service he asked, and spiritual worship instead of forms, and to God's Messiah yield the homage his miracles required and their own conscience commended.

So in the constituency of our nation, each citizen has his municipal and state and national relations, and has a right in the appropriate walk to his own political preferences. Duties may not, however, safely migrate out of the sectional into the national range. And so our own Society, although its edifice and presses and executive officers be northern, has more than a northern membership, and is by its history and whole errand hitherto a national institution. Its northern officeholders have in the political sphere their own free preferences and duties, but may not transplant into their corporate sphere the likings of their political one. They have their ecclesiastical preferences; but may not, on the Society's platform, do lawfully some things which in the denominational sphere they may and even should do. The occupant of both must not confound the rights and obligations of two distinct provinces, each having in some respects its peculiar and its untransferable obligations. The same man, the same personal and individual disciple of Christ, may occupy various and divergent fields of effort and duty. And when duty may be made out clearly to his conscience as binding him to action in one relation, it does by no means follow that the same action thus required there, is equally his duty in some other of these relations. Some confusion, in these days of coöperative and voluntary association, grows out of the omission to keep ever before us these first principles.

Our institution has had its own specific and restricted sphere, and has hitherto claimed a national character and assumed to do a national work. Since the year 1841 in addition to its issue of tracts and volumes, it has had its system of Colportage. Its presses poured out one kind of publication; its colporteurs were another ambulatory and itinerant publication, bringing home the pages inked by the press under the eyes, and by God's blessing, into the abodes and hearts of multitudes of the sparse, neglected, and irreligious of our national population. So evidently had the divine benediction

rested upon this form of labor, that it grew rapidly in the favor of the churches. At our last anniversary, in 1857, the Society reported, that during the sixteen years of the colportage enterprise, there had been expended more than $950,000,* or well-nigh a million, upon this living arm of our distributive agency. Of the 754 colporteurs, including students, whom it had sent out in the year then closing, 320, or more than four-tenths of the whole itinerant band, had labored in the fifteen southern and south-western states.† Of sparse population generally, and with wide tracts of moral destitution, this region seemed especially to need and to welcome such aid. And of the donations and legacies reported as that year received into our treasury,‡ more than $27,000 had been contributed from these southern and south-western states.

In the annual meeting of 1856, a Committee of Fifteen had been appointed to inquire into and review the doings of the Executive Committee. The membership of this Committee of Fifteen combined men of highest influence in the churches, and whose names had many of them most justly a currency and weight far beyond our national limits. Fourteen of their number united in a report accepted in the annual meeting of 1857. In it, having declared § that "the Tract Society was founded, not to discuss disputed questions in theology, or morals, or politics, but to spread the truth in its simplicity and purity, as it is held and loved by all evangelical Christians," they added also, as such Committee of Fifteen, the expression of their "hope, that by the divine blessing, their views of the subject will MEET THE APPROBATION OF THEIR CHRISTIAN FRIENDS IN ALL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY."‖ This was of course an anticipation of the acquiescence and coöperation of our southern membership in those views. They then went on to the recommendation of five resolutions, which have been largely reprinted, as bearing on the question of publications respecting slavery.¶ The first of these resolutions recapitulated and reaffirmed the Society's original definition of its corporate purpose, "the circulation of religious tracts calculated to receive the approbation of all evangelical Christians." The second stated, "that this Society cannot therefore with propriety allow itself to be made a special organ of any one system of religious or moral reform, such as temperance, peace, anti-popery, anti-slavery, etc.; while within its proper sphere,

* Annual Report, page 233. † Pp. 35, 39. ‡ P. 30. § P. 225.
‖ P. 225. ¶ Pp. 226, 227.

its influence should sustain the cause of truth and righteousness in all their departments." The third added, "that in endeavoring to accomplish its high and holy mission, the Society should deal even-handedly, and bear impartial testimony against all forms of fundamental doctrinal error and practical immorality, prevailing in any and every part of our country." The fourth, the main feature of the Report, stated, "that in the judgment of your Committee, the political aspects of slavery lie entirely without the proper sphere of this Society, and cannot be discussed in its publications; but that those moral duties which grow out of the existence of slavery, as well as those moral evils and vices which it is known to promote, and which are condemned in Scripture, and so much deplored by evangelical Christians, undoubtedly do fall within the province of this Society, and can and ought to be discussed in a fraternal and Christian spirit." A fifth referred to the revision of books.* A sixth resolution referred

* The first five resolutions are here given entire:

"In relation to publishing upon the subject of slavery, the Committee recommend the adoption of the following resolutions, as marking out the line of discrimination between what the American Tract Society, according to its Constitution, may and may not publish:

"*Resolved*, 1. That the American Tract Society was established for a definite purpose, namely, "to diffuse a knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of sinners, and to promote the interests of vital godliness and sound morality, by the circulation of religious tracts calculated to receive the approbation of all evangelical Christians."

"2. That this Society cannot therefore with propriety allow itself to be made a special organ of any one system of religious or moral reform, such as temperance, peace, anti-popery, anti-slavery, etc.; while within its proper sphere, its influence should sustain the cause of truth and righteousness in all their departments.

"3. That in endeavoring to accomplish its high and holy mission, the Society should deal evenhandedly, and bear impartial testimony against all forms of fundamental doctrinal error and practical immorality, prevailing in any and every part of our country.

"4. That in the judgment of your committee, the political aspects of slavery lie entirely without the proper sphere of this Society, and cannot be discussed in its publications; but that those moral duties which grow out of the existence of slavery, as well as those moral evils and vices which it is known to promote, and which are condemned in Scripture, and so much deplored by evangelical Christians, undoubtedly do fall within the province of this Society, and can and ought to be discussed in a fraternal and Christian spirit.

"5. That whatever considerations in the past may have seemed to recommend to the Publishing Committee the course pursued in its revision of certain works, yet in the future publication of books and tracts, no alteration or omission of the sentiments of any author should be made; but works not adapted to the design of the Society in their original form, or by a regular impartial abridgment, should be wholly omitted."

to the mode of amending the Constitution. They then passed on to general remarks upon the business affairs, the accounts kept by the Society, and its general operations. And here the Committee of Fifteen added, that "no part of the Society's present operations can WITH PROPRIETY BE CURTAILED. The wants of the destitute," said they, "will continue to DEMAND EXPANSION. THE FIELD FOR EFFORT IS DAILY OPENING, AND THE CHANNELS OF USEFULNESS BECOMING DEEPER AND BROADER, and the Society is called upon TO ENTER AND OCCUPY ALL THESE APPROACHES TO THE PERISHING."* They add also that the Society's "system of BOOK AND TRACT publication and DISTRIBUTION has grown up under the influence of causes which have controlled them. It has thus far produced only good fruits to the glory of God, and SHOULD NOT BE DISTURBED." This language seems plainly an emphatic commendation of the colportage enterprise, which is one great arm of our "DISTRIBUTION," as one not to be "DISTURBED." We put in a more prominent character the words which we desire, as a Publishing Committee, to present as having weighed especially with our own minds. The position which these distinguished brethren to their own judgment occupied, was evidently not revolutionary; and they go on, as the conclusion of their report, to add the recommendation of yet other resolutions, Nos. 7, 8, and 9.† To these we shall afterwards return. In the 8th, they commended cordially the past fidelity and devotedness of the Society's officers and Executive Committee; and in the 9th, expressed great confidence in the wisdom of the Executive Committee in carrying out the principles of these resolutions.

The Publishing Committee before that anniversary, and before that report of the Committee of Fifteen, had sought to ascertain if there could be some form of publication on the moral relations of master and servant in slavery, that should be acceptable to all evan-

* Annual Report, page 229.

† "7. That we gratefully acknowledge the favor of divine Providence in the blessing which has rested upon the American Tract Society, in its onward progress of success and prosperity, and the beneficent influence it has exerted upon our country and the world.

"8. That we cordially recognize the fidelity and devotedness with which the interests of the Society have been superintended and conducted by the officers and Executive Committee, five of the present members having been among its original founders.

"9. That with great confidence in the wisdom of the Executive Committee, we anticipate that their action, in carrying out the principles contained in the previous resolutions, will be such as will tend to promote the widest and best usefulness of this Society throughout our whole country."

gelical Christians in every section of our common country. In June, 1856, a sermon on the Duties of Masters, preached and printed some years since in Kentucky, was submitted to the Publishing Committee, with which other selections on the same subject from southern writers were soon combined; and the Committee seeing no course more likely to have general acceptance than to reissue what had been published by esteemed southern brethren of various evangelical denominations, directed proofs to be taken for deliberate, confidential consideration, by themselves and by officers and friends of the Society whom they wished to consult. During the summer and autumn of that year, (1856,) a season of high political excitement, they learned distinctly that the issuing of that treatise would be gravely objected to, for very diverse reasons, by many both north and south. The difficulties of political entanglement inherent in the theme distinctly appeared; and among them, that the sermon written in one southern state, animadverted upon state legislation, not found there, but long established in other states. Though by a southern author, it had not currency and sympathy with all his fellow-Christians in those latter states. And it is now known that another Society, before its being submitted to us, had on this account declined its publication. A southern issue of it proved therefore no warrant of its being in the entire South acceptable, or of its impinging on no political questions. Yet the Publishing Committee held the entire treatise under consideration till the Committee of Fifteen met, when at the request of one of that Committee, proof impressions were supplied them; but that Committee took no action on this treatise, and expressed no opinion as to the propriety of the Society's issuing it.

The Publishing Committee, on the harmonious and prompt adoption by the Society of the report of the Committee of Fifteen, felt it their duty, and it was their earnest intent and effort to realize in their action the balanced instructions of that report. But,

I. A NEW STATE OF THINGS not foreseen by the Committee of Fifteen—and which this Publishing Committee, though early apprehending it, most certainly never by any act or wish or delay of theirs aided or precipitated—now developed itself. The five resolutions first quoted had to many at the North seemed a full committal of the Tract Society to the antislavery cause, and had been widely circulated as such, apart from the counterpoise of the accompanying report and the other resolutions. Southern feeling was most widely

aroused. From individuals known as true and fast friends of the Tract Society in the southern and south-western states, from our colporteurs and agents there, from branch and state societies, and from denominational gatherings in that field, there came back an abundant and overwhelming mass of evidence, now on the files of the Society, that further action in the issue even of the contemplated treatise, though of southern authorship, would have the effect of dismembering our Society, of destroying its nationality so far as that portion of the country was concerned, and of excluding from that entire field our colporteurs and the volumes and tracts of the Society, even those books that were on other topics, because bearing our Society's imprint, an imprint now made suspected.

The living authors of the proposed treatise on the Duties of Masters protested against their share of it being, in this state of feeling, issued from our press. They had certainly a moral right to say in what mode their writings should be published. We had no warrant or precedent to send out the words of a living author against his own explicit wishes. In an institution, from its catholic and Christian character pledged to "love the brotherhood," was it fitting to counteract the express wishes of brethren, in a mode which even secular publishers are accustomed to avoid?

We had no right to use, in this widely changed state of affairs, as peremptory instructions, a set of resolutions that had been drawn up under another condition of feeling, and with the expressed hope of the Committee of Fifteen, their authors, that these views would meet "APPROBATION" in "ALL PARTS OF OUR COUNTRY." Instead there was, justly or unjustly, a fixed and emphatic DISAPPROBATION in VERY MANY "PARTS OF OUR COUNTRY." Even in the north many—a great body perhaps in our northern constituency—were not ready to sustain such action. A body of bank directors who might have laid down, for a subordinate committee, a plan of finance predicated on the older and more prosperous state of exchanges and traffic, would certainly not have expected that plan to be implicitly followed, upon the country's passing into a new phase of distrust and insolvency. The change of surrounding affairs would require, as an act of justice to the authors even of the instructions, a suspension of action by the subordinates, should the literal execution of the first instructions now involve, in the new phase of the commercial community, a wide-spread loss. As well might it be asserted, that no commercial revulsion in the world

of traffic has occurred since July last, as to claim that the Publishing Committee in that month found the state of feeling in the entire national field of the Tract Society the same as that hopeful and harmonious one which the Committee of Fifteen saw around them two months before when introducing their report.

II. But again, not only had a new state of things presented itself in the judgments and feelings of Christians in the southern and south-western states; but also there had been, in addition to the resolutions thus commending publications on the evils and duties attendant upon slavery, OTHER RESOLUTIONS expressly extending to the Executive Committee and to the Publishing Committee as a constituent part of such Executive Committee, the assurance that the Society had some opinion of their wisdom and discretion. This certainly intimated that SOME SCOPE AND RANGE WERE ALLOWED THEIR JUDGMENT as to the time and measures of action. The ninth resolution was, "That with GREAT CONFIDENCE IN THE WISDOM OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, WE ANTICIPATE THAT THEIR ACTION, IN CARRYING OUT THE PRINCIPLES CONTAINED IN THE PREVIOUS RESOLUTIONS, WILL BE SUCH AS WILL TEND TO PROMOTE THE WIDEST AND BEST USEFULNESS OF THIS SOCIETY THROUGHOUT OUR WHOLE COUNTRY." Could this Publishing Committee honestly go forward to a course which, instead of the WIDEST usefulness, would NARROW and CUT OFF, in certain fields, ALL FURTHER USEFULNESS? Could they, to gratify one section, northern or western, deliberately renounce all further purpose of caring for "OUR WHOLE COUNTRY," so far as that country meant the south and the south-west? Would they be justified in issuing upon southern duties a book that was to find no southern readers; and for the sake of obtaining a volume thus to lie unused, were they to close the whole southern field henceforth against their other tracts and volumes, so largely blessed there in time past, and likely to do for Christ and his cause so good a work in long years to come? Was it discreet, for an abstraction, thus to surrender the practical and undeniable reality of heaven-blessed effort already working in such extensive regions; and to which the language of the Committee of Fifteen was singularly applicable, that "the field for effort is daily opening, and the channels of usefulness becoming deeper and broader?" The north, again, a very momentous portion of their constituency, were by no means united in their wishes as to discussing this topic at all; or, those of them wishing it discussed, in their interpretation of, and the limits which

they gave to, the recent report. Multitudes of earnest Christian men at the north watched with anxiety and distrust the operation of a novel and, as they deemed it likely to become, a revolutionary movement in the Society. Others, in their strong dislike and renunciation of all acknowledgment of domestic bondage, held the title, "*Duties* of Masters," an endorsement most unwarranted of a wrong, as they claimed, which could have no duties but the one of immediate repentance, and contrite and utter abandoning of all further authority.

The Publishing Committee knew too, and of this there is documentary evidence, that this resolution in its original shape, as drafted by one honored member of the Committee of Fifteen, explicitly and distinctly named usefulness in "THE FIFTEEN SLAVE STATES," and recommended the Executive Committee to seek "TO KEEP OPEN" this field. As is stated in the published letter of another respected member of that Committee of Fifteen, who condemns our failure to publish under the five resolutions, the last-named member modified this offered motion, and its mover accepted the modification into its present shape. But the removal of the *specific* reference to the slave states left the *general principle* of usefulness in "*the whole country*" still binding. It seemed to us that the modification removed only the illustration, but left the vital and comprehensive requirement, embracing that and other illustrations, still intact in all its original force. The Publishing Committee would, in their own earnest, unanimous, and rooted conviction, have positively disobeyed this ninth resolution, had they proceeded to any act as a subordinate committee virtually damming up the whole channel of southern colportage, and exscinding half of our states. If the ninth and the fourth resolutions conflict, it was not the right of the Publishing or of the Executive Committee to take any new step that should make the one resolution swallow up the other. This was a complicated knot and entanglement in the instructions of the report itself. There were the poised and carefully guarded contributions, like checks and balances, cast into the resolutions from opposite sides by members of the Committee of Fifteen, having various shades of opinion as to the future policy of the Society, and occupying, so to speak, some a more radical, and some a more conservative platform. The result in the new state of affairs when so large a portion of the country withheld its consent, was, that the checks of the counterpoising resolutions clogged further action. We had no right, by violent act of ours, to hold one set *explicit*, and to pronounce the other

set a *nullity*. To abide by the policy of the past, and await further light, was due to the Society, the cause, and to the Publishing Committee's own views of duty.

III. But it is said, The known *intention* of the Committee of Fifteen was to inaugurate a new action, and to carry up at all sacrifices the Society to another and higher stage of testimony. And that such was their intention, is argued from the letter of a distinguished member of that Committee, who, though not meeting with them, addressed to his fellow-members a letter arguing the question of the Society's duties, and which, at the request of two other members, he has since published. None can be more ready than the Publishing Committee to allow to this eminent man the weight justly due to his opinions. But they cannot, as a Publishing Committee, hide from themselves the fact, that the positions of that letter go further than the ground subsequently assumed by the Committee of Fifteen in their report. His argument would make it the duty of the Tract Society to assail the Christian lawfulness of domestic slavery, as we understand his reasonings. Now the others of the Committee of Fifteen take explicitly the view, that the Tract Society could not be properly made a special organ of antislavery.* If the Committee of Fifteen did not assume his position on this main topic, why hold that they, the Committee of Fifteen, assumed to stand with him in contemplating the separation of the south as a possible or probable result? Because his letter—a letter not published at the anniversary of the Society, and which was in no sense before that body at its annual meeting—did anticipate, with his clear and characteristic foresight, this dismemberment as a result not impossible, are we to infer that the Society held such views and deliberately contemplated such seission? Large as his influence would justly be, this Publishing Committee believe that no annual meeting of the Society would, even upon his explicit recommendation, had he in person made it, have passed an *unanimous* approval of separation from the South. On the contrary, the Publishing Committee fully believe that on the Committee of Fifteen there were brethren belonging to the conservative party found at the North, a party acting in voluntary Societies and ecclesiastical relations with the antislavery part of our churches, but in sentiment on this topic widely disparted from them. Such brethren, it is believed, would have withholden their consent from

* Annual Report, p. 226.

any report, had it nakedly or impliedly faced the alternative of excluding southern Christians from further coöperation; and it is therefore held by the Publishing Committee, that had the ninth resolution and its companions not come in as a part of the general report of the Committee of Fifteen, then the five resolutions that came first in that document would have appeared before the Society as a report from a portion of the Committee of Fifteen, but lacking the sanction of others of that Committee who would have counterpoised that document by offering as their report to the Society another paper of an opposite aim and tendency.

The "*animus imponentis*," or the intention OF THE ENACTING BODY, is an important question in casuistry with regard to a new law. And that question in this case becomes, What was the purpose of THE SOCIETY—not of the *Committee of Fifteen*—but the *Society* at its annual meeting, on adopting that report, and in sending down to the officers and Executive Committee these resolutions? THAT SOCIETY is the party *laying on* us, or *imposing* these instructions. What as a Society did they intend? Now, evidently, not separation from the South. The *unanimity* of the vote was tangible and irrefutable evidence of this. No candid thinker conversant with the sentiments of the members of the Society, and with the tone of feeling in the anniversary meetings, believes that an unanimous vote could have been ever given, consciously, for the dismemberment of the Society. And had this been the contemplated result, the services of devout thanksgiving to Almighty God which followed the adoption harmoniously of report and resolutions, would have been altered. God would have been sought; but it would have been with some other and conflicting emotions rather than those of jubilant exultation, if the act just passed had been thought to be, in purpose and in assured result, the farewell of tribes going out of our Israel.

The appointment in the anniversary of 1856 of that Committee could have contemplated no such scission. Had it done so, then, according to all the recognized rules of parliamentary equity, the South would have been assigned its share of membership in the committee whose action was expected to decide whether they should or should not remain in the working fellowship of the Society.

The language of the Committee, in their report actually made in 1857, when it spoke of *channels* as *extending*, and a work of distribution as *not to be disturbed*, evidently forbade the interpretation, that

they, even of the Committee, expected a rude clogging and shrinking of the old channels, and a revolutionary upheaval of our colportage enterprise through the entire southern field.

Now the intention of parties adopting an act—and here the Society at its anniversary is such adopting and enacting party—is an element of utmost potency in questions of interpretation. That intention manifestly was not excision.

IV. But to pass from these considerations, the Publishing Committee and the Executive Committee of which they form a part, were but a SUBORDINATE BODY cast on this new state of affairs under resolutions thus debateable in their scope, and which, because of their ambiguous and conflicting character, one honored member of the Committee of Fifteen had declined to sign.* And now, with these manifestations that the Society actually intended no separation from the South, the Committee were called upon to decide by their action a grave practical question affecting the Society's national character. It is in all cases of subordinate agents, exercising a vague and disputed power, A SAFE AND HONORED RULE, THAT THE ACTION OF THE SUBORDINATES SHOULD FAR AS POSSIBLE AVOID INNOVATION, AND LEAVE ANY EMERGING QUESTION at stake to remain unaffected by their subordinate acts, and to be in its integrity reserved FOR THE DECISION OF THE HIGHER POWER APPOINTING THEM. Here the Society is such superior power. By withholding further action in the premises, the Executive Committee retained yet the Society undivided, and saved the question as to separation, for the Society at the next anniversary. The Society could then, in full cognizance of the case and its results, act according to their own wisdom. If the Executive Committee and this Publishing Committee have erred, their error is not now in such a shape as to embarrass the free movements of the Society. If they, the entire Society, judge that the publication should be issued at all events, and leave the South to become separate, the Society so wishing—if not constitutionally hindered from so doing—can in the lapse of a few months do their will, and our action has not made it impossible. But supposing the Executive Committee to have with the Publishing Committee issued the proposed treatise, and precipitated the withdrawal of the South, and supposing the Society at large to regret such separation—such their regret would have become un-

* The Rev. M. B. Anderson, LL. D., President of the University of Rochester, N. Y.

availing practically in consequence of our irretrievable action. For every considerate man must know that such withdrawal once occurring could not be repaired, the breach made could not have been healed, however large the majority at the anniversary who might assemble to deprecate its occurrence. The subordinate would have tied the hands of his principal without any explicit warrant for his action.

It is said, The separation was but menaced, and like the often predicted political secessions of our country, the mere threat would have brought no practical result. But to this the Publishing Committee reply: Such a statement overlooks the positive facts in our own possession and the whole drift of our ecclesiastical history. De Tocqueville, a profound and sagacious observer of social change, and familiar with our institutions, has remarked in a recent work of his on the old monarchy of France, that religious revolutions are far more easy and speedy than political; and that barriers of territory and boundary which secular changes cannot overpass, are continually overleaped by ecclesiastical revolution. Our whole recent history shows the truth of the pregnant remark. Our states keep yet the oft threatened but still enduring political bond. But their ecclesiastical ties, between North and South, have been rapidly and repeatedly sundered. The rupture of the voluntary bond of the Society between Christians of the North and South was easy, and once made by the Executive Committee would to all human judgment have been one not to be healed. If it must be made, is it not better that it should be done deliberately, with full knowledge, and by the body having the moral right? No subordinate body could well hold itself entitled under instructions not explicit, as being authorized, by any side act of theirs, to inaugurate such extended and such enduring separation. If the Society contemplate it, and lawfully may consummate it, they would prefer meeting it in their own action, and that action a direct one.

V. After the declaration of the entire dissatisfaction of Christians in the South and South-west with publications by the Tract Society on this topic, THE CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION CAME UP, WHETHER THE ORIGINAL, INCORPORATE PURPOSE OF THE SOCIETY, (as reaffirmed in the first of the five resolutions of the Committee of Fifteen,) DID NOT EXPLICITLY FORBID SUCH PUBLICATION WHEN LARGE BODIES OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS WERE OPPOSED. It is no part of the purpose of the Committee in this

paper to argue the extent of the Society's constitutional powers; but it must be apparent to all that this obstacle, arising before them as subordinate agents, was one of the gravest character. If the coöperation and acquiescence of the whole country, which the Committee of Fifteen in the remarks introducing their report anticipated, had been in fact continued, this constitutional objection would not of course have presented itself. But on the manifestation of this dissatisfaction, surviving founders of the Society still acting on its Executive Committee or as officers, (and including the lamented Dr. Knox Chairman of this Committee,) issued publicly their view that the Constitution hindered further progress. The question was one of good faith—of legality—of widest and gravest practical consequence. It was claimed that the testimony of founders was of high moment here. When the language of a document has been by various parties on some recent emergency construed in opposing senses, the contemporary opinions of those engaged in the first shaping of the Society using, or instrument containing that language, are regarded as elements of interpretation. The legal questions as to the property of the religious body of Friends or Quakers, when claimed by parties of opposing religious sentiment, were in part solved by reference to the writings of early Quakers, evidence, from those times of their denominational origin, of what had been the religious views of the first founders of the body. The Parker Society of England, in their voluminous reprints of the first Anglican Reformers, furnished what every fair inquirer accepted as very decisive contemporary aid, as to the meaning of the makers of the Thirty-nine Articles and the compilers of the Liturgy of the national church. It was further urged, that the practice of the Society for thirty years had also been in harmony with this view of constitutional restriction. When from great numbers of the Society's firmest friends, in all parts of the country, this course of argument was presented as in their judgment indicating, in our very corporate structure, an organic and insuperable barrier, it became the evident and inevitable duty of those occupying but a subordinate agency, to abstain from any act that in its effects or results should anticipate or embarrass the action of the superior authority to which the decision legitimately belonged.

It has been no pleasure to dissent from excellent brethren who have judged otherwise than do we, as to the bounds of our province,

and the requirements of our position as a committee. The Executive Committee from the first were, with their experience, unable to foresee how any path left open to the Committee could, in the collision of jarring interests and sections, unite the suffrages of all friends of the Society. For "railing," either at the North or the South, which they are forbidden to retaliate, they have had little regard. Anxious to know and do their duty, they leave the question of further action in the Society calmly but prayerfully with their brethren of the Society and with the God of providence. Out of this Society, and in their own spheres, political and ecclesiastical, they have their own personal convictions, upon many matters, which they do not however deem the basis of their action as trustees in a subordinate capacity of a great national organization.

Of the Secretaries of the Society, this Publishing Committee deem it but an act of simplest justice to put thus upon record their united and earnest attestation, that in the action of this Publishing Committee they have had occasion ever to feel how well deserved was the endorsement of the Committee of Fifteen as to "the fidelity and devotedness with which the interests of the Society had been superintended and conducted by the officers,"* including these brethren. In their own action as a Publishing Committee, they have known nothing of the disposition to encroach and overrule which some have seemed inclined to impute to these excellent men. As was to be expected, they have indeed as officers ever felt, and righteously, a warm interest in maintaining the union and efficiency of the corporate body which they served. Far as the names and testimony of this Publishing Committee, a testimony founded upon long acquaintance and close observation in the matter, have weight, they wish to declare, emphatically and unanimously, their dissent from any judgment impeaching a career officially so honorable, energetic, catholic, and upright.

DAVID MAGIE,
WILLIAM R. WILLIAMS,
WILLIAM ADAMS,
BENJAMIN C. CUTLER,
NEHEMIAH ADAMS.

New York, 30th March, 1858.

* Annual Report, page 230.

UNANIMOUS ADOPTION BY THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

OF THE

FOREGOING MINUTE AND ACT OF THE PUBLISHING COMMITTEE.

In reaching these conclusions, the Publishing Committee have throughout been aided by conference with, and suggestions from their brethren forming the other portion of the Executive Committee. In fact, although the question—relating as it did to the issue of publications—was in its *form* the responsibility primarily of the *Publishing* Committee, yet in its *substance* it has been regarded and discussed finally as the common responsibility of the whole Executive Committee, to whom collectively the resolutions accompanying the Report of the Committee of Fifteen make reference. The result of such patient and general deliberations has been a cordial and earnest unanimity. The Executive Committee are together in this matter, clear in the judgment, and hearty and undivided in the expression of that judgment.

The positions upon which they rest are then, briefly stated, these:

Occurrence of a new and unexpected state of things.

I. For the action of the Society at its anniversary of 1857, as adopted upon the recommendation of the Committee of Fifteen, it had been hoped as that Committee explicitly state,* that it would "MEET THE APPROBATION OF THEIR CHRISTIAN FRIENDS IN ALL PARTS OF OUR COUNTRY." The Publishing and Executive Committee setting themselves, in all candor and prudence and honesty, to carry these recommendations into execution, found another state of sentiment than that thus anticipated. Christians of the southern and south-western states most earnestly and generally disapproved; and many of the firm friends of the Society at the north sympathized in such dissent. There is a large conservative interest in the northern churches, devout, liberal, and laborious as friends of the Society, who, though by preference reticent on the first outbreak of strife, are fixed and staunch in deprecating any rent with the South. It was evident that any publication upon the topic would dismember the Society, and must recall or exclude our southern colporteurs, and clog or utterly choke the channels at the south and south-west, for the further circulation of any of the works bearing our imprint. This was not mere apprehension. We had the per-

* P. 225.

sonal assurances of some of our best southern laborers. There were colporteurs withdrawn, or excluded, funds withholden, and measures initiated for the entire separation of our southern auxiliaries, which process of rending has been arrested only by the present position of the Executive Committee. It was A CHANGE IN THE WHOLE STATE OF THE FIELD FROM THAT ASSUMED AS PROBABLE IN THE ANNIVERSARY PROCEEDINGS. Loyalty to the entire constituency, and even to the northern friends of the movement, forbade further action upon recommendations which had been expressly predicated on another supposed state of affairs than that which was now found to exist.

The ninth and closing resolutions direct not to hazard the usefulness of the Society in the whole country.

II. But the resolutions recommending such new publication had not stood alone. As a CONSERVATIVE COUNTERPOISE to any rash action under them, there had been, in and by the Committee of Fifteen, added OTHER RESOLUTIONS EQUALLY BINDING, the one of which, the ninth,* expressing confidence in the wisdom of the Executive Committee, anticipated of them action tending "TO PROMOTE THE WIDEST AND BEST USEFULNESS OF THIS SOCIETY THROUGHOUT OUR WHOLE COUNTRY." It had the emphasis of position. It was the final resolution, the closing sentence, and the LAST WORD of the Committee of Fifteen—to borrow a scriptural phrase, "the conclusion of the whole matter." It was the closing charge of a report which, in its opening sentences, had explicitly declared that it was not the province of the Society to take up in theology or morals what were "DISPUTED QUESTIONS." This ninth resolution carried yet higher the restriction. It was known that in its original shape it had explicitly named the fifteen slave states as needing to be kept open; and though that express illustration had been withdrawn, the general principle remained, and was thus emphatically announced. Those states could not be held out of, and forming no part in "OUR WHOLE COUNTRY." No logic of construction could carve them apart. We were not to sacrifice "THE WIDEST USEFULNESS" of the Society. If we denationalized it—if the bridge spanning the whole confederacy, as we took it in charge at the one anniversary, was to have its central arch by our act cut out, and the structure be given up at our next anniversary in the new condition of being no longer a thoroughfare—could we claim to have respected orders, guarded the trust interest, or conserved the Society's USEFULNESS?

* P. 230.

Known intention of the Society in acts of Anniversary of 1857.

III. Nor could it be claimed, that THE SOCIETY, in its anniversary of 1857, HAD A CLEAR INTENTION of requiring the publication at all risks, and even should Christians of the southern and south-western states in consequence seeede. The unanimity in accepting the report and resolutions of the Committee of Fifteen barred such claim. Whatever may be thought as to the relative strength of numbers for or against severance, no anniversary of the Society ever yet held would have given an UNANIMOUS VOTE for SEPARATION. That the vote on the report was unanimous here, and that it was regarded at the hour as cause of thanksgiving to God, was evidence that, in the judgment of the Society so hailing it, separation was not intended by the report, and need not be expected. If instructions be conflicting, or their language debatable, the INTENTION OF THE BODY GIVING THEM is an element of interpretation in guiding the subordinate parties that receive the instructions. That intention in this case never was to sever and denationalize the Society.

Duty of subordinate agent, in dubious case, not to put an interest beyond reach of corrective action by the superior body.

IV. The Publishing and Executive Committee were but A SUBORDINATE BODY, acting with limited powers under a Society itself occupying by its Constitution a platform of certain limits as to object and work. In cases of doubt or debate, as to the acts of subordinates, it is a rule of common morality, that if the powers be doubtful, the act should not be, if it can be avoided, such as to be irrevocable. If the superior and appointing power have failed to give explicit instructions, his subordinate ought not to enter on any novel course, which his superior, if dissatisfied, would be unable to revise. By arresting publication, the Executive Committee saved the question, entire and intact, for the Society the superior body. If the Society wish it, they can proceed, if constitutionally so empowered. All lost is but the delay of a few months. But had the subordinate body assumed, in spite of the debate as to their rights, the authority, and made the publication, their act would have been irrevocable. The separation once made, the Society would have found itself at its next anniversary impotent to remedy, however much they might regret it. ACTION BY A SUBORDINATE, in such dubious cases, when INVOLVING RESULTS WHICH THE SUPERIOR BODY CANNOT RECALL, IS BUT THE UNWARRANTABLE ARROGATION OF POWERS NOT RIGHTFULLY GIVEN.

Constitutional objection interposed.

V. The action of this committee was further embarrassed by the fact that the issuing of such publications on the subject of slavery in the then existing state of public sentiment, would have been regarded by many friends of the Society as a palpable INFRINGEMENT OF OUR CONSTITUTION. It is not the object of the committee in this paper to discuss the Society's constitutional powers; but they could not ignore the fact that the issuing of such tracts under the circumstances would have been regarded as in conflict with the Constitution as understood by surviving founders of the Society, (in the Executive Committee and among its officers,) by the entire body of evangelical Christians at the South, and by many of its firm friends at the North; and as in conflict with the policy which had marked its course of harmonious action through all former years of its existence.

The trustees of no interest or party or sect or section among their constituency, the Executive Committee were to do, far as they could find it, "evenhanded" justice to the North and the South, the East and the West. They have, though Northern men, no wish to know or remember this sectional character of their residence, while occupying the platform of a national institution. Out of the sphere of this Society—in the separate sphere of their own church relations, in the pulpit, and in the voting precinct—they have their own personal convictions, and these they claim, retain, and use.

And now, with these views of expediency, duty, and right, as made to their own minds the clearer, the calmer, and the firmer by each new and prayerful meditation of them—and coming out to their own judgments the more sharply and distinctly, as the light streams in upon these fields of Time and Earth, from that Eternity whose gate but lately opened to admit a beloved fellow-laborer—the Executive Committee submit their action in the premises to the entire Society. May the Father of lights guide his own people to a wise and righteous, and if it be his will, a harmonious settlement.

PUBLISHING COMMITTEE.	DISTRIBUTING COMMITTEE.	FINANCE COMMITTEE.	
DAVID MAGIE,	WILLIAM FORREST,	RICHARD T. HAINES,	EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.
WILLIAM R. WILLIAMS,	WILLIAM WINTERTON,	MOSES ALLEN,	
WILLIAM ADAMS,	ALFRED M. TREDWELL,	THOMAS C. DOREMUS,	
BENJAMIN C. CUTLER,	OLIVER H. LEE,	RICHARD S. FELLOWES,	
NEHEMIAH ADAMS.	ALFRED S. BARNES.	GEORGE N. TITUS,	
		OLIVER E. WOOD.	

NEW YORK, March 30, 1858.

☞ The Society's thirty-third anniversary will be held in New York, Wednesday, May 12, at 9 A. M.